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INTERNATIONAL SECURITY / MIDDLE EAST UPDATE
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1. U.S. Supports International Efforts to Aid Syrian Refugees (01-08-2014)

By Jane Morse
Staff Writer

Washington — As violence in Syria enters its third year, the needs of its refugees — and of neighboring countries providing them refuge — are greater than ever, U.S. officials say, and the United States is supporting international efforts to provide aid.

More than 9.3 million people — more than 40 percent of Syria's population — require humanitarian assistance, according to Nancy Lindborg, an assistant administrator at the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID).

"In just the last year, the number of people displaced inside Syria has quadrupled from 1.5 million to more than 6.5 million," she said at a January 7 hearing of the U.S. Senate Judiciary Subcommittee on Constitution, Civil Rights and Human Rights.

"More Syrians are now internally displaced from their homes than anywhere else in the world. An additional 2.3 million Syrians have fled to neighboring countries in search of safety," Lindborg said.

Although the governments and citizens of neighboring countries such as Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey have welcomed Syrian refugees, their generosity is being strained to the limits, according to Anne Richard, assistant secretary of state for population, refugees and migration.

Testifying with Lindborg at the hearing, Richard said the governments of Syria's neighbors are concerned that they must stretch the services they provide to their own citizens to reach the overwhelming numbers of vulnerable refugees living in their countries.

"Schools have moved to double shifts to accommodate Syrian children," Richard said. "Hospital beds are filled by Syrian patients. Rents have risen and wages have fallen as a result of the competition for housing and jobs. There are water shortages in Jordan and Lebanon."

The State Department and USAID are major funders of the top humanitarian organizations responding to the crisis, Richard said, providing more than $1.3 billion in assistance to date.

Richard said that among the U.N. agencies and nongovernmental organizations working with U.S. support to aid Syrian refugees are the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees, the U.N. World Food Programme, UNICEF and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East.

"Together, these agencies and others are providing food, clean water, shelter, medical care and other basic essentials," Richard said. "They also go beyond these basic needs and seek to protect the most vulnerable members of Syrian society today — displaced children, at-risk women and girls, the elderly and the disabled — from threats as diverse as cold winters, unsafe play areas, poor sanitation, child marriage and violence against women and girls."

In December 2013, Valerie Amos, the U.N. under secretary-general for humanitarian affairs and emergency relief coordinator, announced the largest-ever appeal for a single humanitarian emergency: $6.5 billion for Syria and neighboring countries in 2014. The U.N., Richard said, "has worked to make the appeals cost-efficient and high-impact, as well to provide benchmarks to help donors track progress of the refugee response. We are reviewing the appeals now and discussing with partners and other donors the best ways to support these efforts."

The Syrian people, despite their suffering under the Assad regime, will have their chance to forge their own future, said President Obama in remarks he delivered from the White House via a video January 29, 2013.

"The relief we send doesn't say 'Made in America,' but make no mistake — our aid reflects the commitment of the American people," Obama said. The Syrian people "will continue to find a partner in the United States of America."

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2. Hagel Hosts South Korean Foreign Minister for Pentagon Meeting (01-07-2014)

American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, Jan. 7, 2014 – In a meeting with South Korea's top diplomat at the Pentagon yesterday, Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel reaffirmed what Pentagon Press Secretary Navy Rear Adm. John Kirby called "the crucial role of the U.S.-South Korean alliance, which serves as a linchpin for peace and stability in the Asia-Pacific region."

In a statement summarizing Hagel's meeting with Foreign Minister Yun Byung-se, Kirby said Hagel and Yun reaffirmed that both sides must continue to make progress to develop and acquire critical military capabilities necessary to maintain and strengthen the combined U.S.-South Korean defense posture.

"The two discussed the importance of maintaining a robust combined defense of the Korean Peninsula as a strong deterrent against provocations from North Korea," he added. Hagel emphasized the importance of the U.S.-South Korean alliance and confirmed the solid U.S. commitment to the defense of the South Korea, Kirby said.

Today, Defense Department officials announced the rotational deployment of the 1st Cavalry Division's 1st Battalion, 12th Cavalry Regiment, from Fort Hood, Texas, to Camps Hovey and Stanley in South Korea.

This combined arms battalion, with about 800 soldiers and its own wheeled and tracked vehicles, will deploy Feb. 1 to conduct operations in support of U.S. Forces Korea and the U.S. 8th Army, officials said. "This action supports the United States' defense commitment to the Republic of Korea as specified by the mutual defense treaty and presidential agreements," they added in a statement announcing the deployment.

The battalion will provide a trained and combat-ready force that will deploy with its equipment to South Korea, and the equipment will remain there for use by follow-on rotations, they added. The soldiers will return to Fort Hood upon completion of their nine-month rotation.

Biographies:
Chuck Hagel

Statement

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3. Shelton Discusses Importance of Space Defense (01-07-2014)

By Jim Garamone
American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, Jan. 7, 2014 – Space is fundamental to the economy, the military and the way of life in the United States and officials must continue to guard against challenges in the domain from adversaries, the commander of Air Force Space Command said today.

Gen. William Shelton shared with students at George Washington University here some of his worries and concerns.

In the past 60 years, space has grown from a domain with a lone satellite beeping across the heavens to a $300 billion economic engine.

"The advent of space systems has allowed citizens and governments to engage routinely in the world around them, communicate at the speed of light and to tap sources of information previously unavailable to them," Shelton said.

Satellites are now essential parts of the 21st century way of life for all nations. Weather forecasting, precise navigation, instant communications and many other capabilities tie space to Earth.

These are incredibly important during crises. The death tolls from Hurricane Katrina in 2005 and the Japanese tsunami in 2011 would have been even higher had not satellite surveillance and communications been available, he said.

Space has also changed the military. “In all of recorded history, when armies met on the battle field, they fought for the coveted high ground because of the obvious advantage it gave them over the adversary,” Shelton said. “Later, balloons performed that function and even later, airplanes were used as observation platforms.”

Space is the ultimate high ground, he said.

Shelton’s command has a global mission with global responsibilities reaching all corners of the planet and up to 23,000 miles in space and geosynchronous orbit. “We get space-derived information to all sorts of users, including the military operators of our nation’s Army, Air Force, Navy and Marines -- those who rely on timely and accurate data,” he said.

Intelligence, logistics and other operationally relevant data flow seamlessly to the front lines in Afghanistan as well as to other parts of the world where U.S. forces are operating.

“I can't think of a single military operation across the full spectrum from humanitarian relief operations all the way to major combat operations that doesn't somehow depend on space for mission success,” Shelton said. “But frankly, this dependence on space has also become quite a bit of a double-edged sword. Our potential adversaries have been going to school on us during these many years of combat operations.”

Adversaries are mimicking American procedures and looking for chinks in American armor, the general said. “More concerning, as they've watched us, we've watched them develop systems to challenge our advantages in space,” he said.

“Because space launch is so expensive, we loaded as much as we could onto our satellites -- multiple missions, multiple payloads, ” Shelton said. “After all, we were operating in a relatively peaceful sanctuary in space.”

Not today. “As I look at the next 20 years in space, we have a difficult, up-hill climb ahead of us,” he said. “I equate this to the difficulty of turning the Queen Mary. You send the rudder command and the delayed response tries your patience.”

To sustain space services, the United States must consider architectural alternatives for future satellite constellations. “These alternatives must balance required capability, affordability and resilience,” he said. “There are many options that we're actively studying right now. The notion of disaggregation is one. And what we mean by this is moving away from the multiple payload, big satellite construct into a less complex satellite architecture with multiple components.”

Distributing space payloads across multiple satellite platforms, increases U.S. resiliency. “At a minimum, it complicates our adversaries’ targeting calculus,” he said.

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4. Pentagon Reaffirms Commitment, Confidence in Iraqi Capability (01-06-2014)

By Army Sgt. 1st Class Tyrone C. Marshall Jr.
American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, Jan. 6, 2014 – The Defense Department remains committed to helping the government and people of Iraq to root out terrorists seeking safe haven, Pentagon spokesman Army Col. Steven Warren told reporters here today.

"We're working closely with the Iraqis to develop a holistic strategy to isolate al-Qaida-affiliated groups so that tribes, working with security forces, can root them out of populated areas," he said.

Warren noted some "early successes" along those lines in Ramadi.

"Tribal forces and police, with the Iraqi army providing overwatch, appear to have isolated the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant in pockets of the city," he said. "It's still early, however."

In working closely with the Iraqi government, Warren said, the primary assistance has come through the State Department's foreign military sales program.

"We're also continuing to accelerate our … foreign military sales deliveries with an additional 100 Hellfire missiles ready for delivery this spring," he said. "These missiles are one small element of a more holistic strategy." They've proven effective at denying ISIL terrorists the safe-haven zones they've sought to establish in western Iraq, he added.

Warren said the Defense Department is committed to promoting stability in Iraq, and that more than $14 billion in equipment, services and training have been delivered to the Iraqi government since 2005.

For example, in the last year, Warren said, the United States delivered six C-130 aircraft, a rapid Avenger surface-to-air missile battery, 27 helicopters, and 12 P301 patrol boats.

"And we've expedited delivery of those 100 Hellfire missiles, along with 10 ScanEagle [unmanned aerial vehicles], which will be delivered this spring," he said.

Warren also reiterated Secretary of State John F. Kerry's recent message that no U.S. forces are being sent to Iraq.

"I think Secretary Kerry was pretty clear this weekend that we will not be sending forces into Iraq," he said. "But we, … like I said, are very much committed to the Iraqis."

The colonel added that the Iraqi army is very capable, and that its capabilities are increasing, largely due to the foreign military sales equipment the United States has sent there.

Warren said service members working in the Office of Security Cooperation in Iraq and Marine Corps security forces at the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad number between 100 and 200. U.S. forces are not doing mission planning, he added, noting that the Office of Security Cooperation works at the ministerial level. "It is the line of communication that we have from the department into Iraqi security forces and the Iraqi army apparatus," said he explained.

Despite media reports, Warren said, he has confidence in the Iraqi army.

"Ramadi is already back under Iraqi control, so I'm confident that the Iraqi army is a very capable force," he said. "And I think Secretary Kerry said it best: this is the Iraqis' fight to fight."

5. French, U.S. Navies Working Together (01-06-2014)

Gulf of Oman — The U.S. Navy's Harry S. Truman Carrier Strike Group began combined operations with the French navy's Task Force 473 in the Gulf of Oman on December 29.

The Truman group, comprising the aircraft carrier USS Harry S. Truman and six other Navy ships, is operating with the French task force to enhance cooperation and interoperability in the region, the U.S. Navy said in a January 4 press release.

"This is a wonderful opportunity for our ships, sailors and Marines to work together and gain a better understanding of each other," said Rear Admiral Kevin Sweeney, commander of the Truman group. "Our operations with Task Force 473 will increase both of our maritime capabilities while helping promote long-term stability in the region."

The French ships include aircraft carrier FS Charles de Gaulle, destroyers FS Forbin and FS Jean de Vienne and replenishment oiler FS Meuse.

"This mission is a big challenge," said Rear Admiral Eric Chaperon, commander of Task Force 473. "France and the USA have been partners for a long time, but with this new and rare opportunity to integrate two carrier strike groups, our cooperation is becoming ever closer. All of our sailors are really proud to have a role to play in building the operational interoperability of our two nations."

Ships from the two navies have participated in a variety of training and operations together, including visit, board, search and seizure training, live-fire gunnery exercises, small-boat operations, deck-landing qualifications, underway replenishments, combat-search-and-rescue training, and air-defense exercises. U.S. and French personnel have traveled to visit counterparts on each other's ships, sharing techniques and experiences.

"Not only is this a great opportunity to conduct operations with a close and trusted ally, this is a great time to learn from each other," Sweeney said. "There are a lot of similarities in the way we operate across the different platforms, but there are also some differences. Understanding those differences will make both of us better, stronger, and enable us to operate with each other and with other navies more effectively. Our presence goes a long way in reassuring our regional partners and allies."

The commanding officers of both carriers also recognize the opportunity the two navies have to learn from each other.

"This mission is a decisive opportunity to share knowledge and build upon our friendship in order to be able to successfully handle future contingencies together," said Captain Pierre Vandier, commanding officer of the FS Charles de Gaulle. "It is also an opportunity to check our interoperability that allows a lot of common procedures and aircraft exchanges."

Captain Bob Roth, commanding officer of the USS Harry S. Truman, fully appreciates the opportunity to work closely with a longtime partner.

"It's a rare and very fulfilling experience to sail alongside and operate closely with another aircraft carrier, especially a carrier from a navy with whom we have so many lasting personnel-exchange programs," he said. "I think we're going to further develop our already deep trust and mutual operational understanding."

6. Army to Destroy Syrian Chemical Weapons aboard Ship (01-03-2014)

By C. Todd Lopez
Army News Service

PORTSMOUTH, Va. , Jan. 3, 2014 – Some 64 specialists from the Army's Edgewood Chemical Biological Center are expected to depart for the Mediterranean in about two weeks aboard an American-owned ship, the Cape Ray, to destroy chemical weapons from Syria.

The nearly 650-foot-long ship, now here, will travel to a yet-to-be specified location in the Mediterranean, where it will take on about 700 metric tons of both mustard gas and "DF compound," a component of the nerve agent sarin gas. Specialists will then use two new, recently installed "field deployable hydrolysis systems" to neutralize the chemicals.

Aboard the Cape Ray will be 35 mariners, about 64 chemical specialists from Edgewood, Md., a security team, and a contingent from U.S. European Command. It's expected the operational portion of the mission will take about 90 days.

During a visit here yesterday, Frank Kendall, undersecretary of Defense for Acquisition, Technology and Logistics, said preparations began before the United States even knew it was committed to the mission -- or that the mission would ever materialize.

"There was a recognition that something was going to happen in Syria, in all likelihood that would require us to do something with those chemical materials that were known to be there," he said.

In December 2012, a request was made to determine what could be done if the U.S. was asked to participate in destruction of chemical weapons from Syria.

By the end of January 2013, a team with the Joint Project Manager for Elimination and the Army's Edgewood Chemical Biological Center had evaluated existing technology and configurations for neutralization of chemical weapons and recommended using the hydrolysis process. Construction of a deployable system began in February, and the first prototype was available in June. A second was available in September.

"We could have waited to see what happened and then reacted to that, or we could have moved out ahead of time and then prepared for what might happen or was likely to happen," Kendall said. "Fortunately … we took the latter course."

Aboard the ship, an environmentally sealed tent contains two FDHS units, which will operate 24 hours a day in parallel to complete the chemical warfare agent neutralization mission.

Each unit costs about $5 million and contains built-in redundancy and a titanium-lined reactor for mixing the chemical warfare agents with the chemicals that will neutralize them.

About 130 gallons of mustard gas can be neutralized at a time, over the course of about two hours, for instance, said Adam Baker, with the Edgewood Chemical Biological Center, Edgewood, Md.

The FDHS systems can, depending on the material, process between 5 to 25 metric tons of material a day. With two systems, that means as much as 50 metric tons a day of chemical warfare agents can be destroyed. The mission requires disposal of 700 metric tons of material. But the plan is not to start out on the first day at full speed, Baker said.

"There is a ramp-up period," he noted. "It's going to be a slow start. We're going to go very deliberately and safely."

Rob Malone, with the Joint Project Manager for Elimination at Edgewood, Md., said the two chemical warfare agents will be neutralized with reagents such as bleach, water or sodium hydroxide.

"They are doing a chemical hydrolysis process. It brings the chemical agent together with a reagent, another chemical," Malone said. "It creates a chemical reaction that basically destroys the chemical agent in and of itself."

The result of that neutralization process will create about 1.5 million gallons of a toxic "effluent" that must be disposed of, but that cannot be used as a chemical weapon. Malone said the effluent is similar to other toxic hazardous compounds that industrial processes generate. There is a commercial market worldwide for disposing of such waste, he noted.

Baker said the effluent will be acidic and will be PH-adjusted to bring it up to "above neutral," as part of the process. The end result will be a liquid that is caustic, similar to commercial drain openers, he added.

Malone said the operational plan includes a cycle of six days of disposal plus one day for maintenance of the equipment. On board will be about 220 6,600-gallon containers that will hold the reagents used in the disposal process, and will also be used afterward to hold the effluent.

"Everything will be kind of contained on the ship throughout the entire process," Malone said.

The U.S. has never disposed of chemical weapons on board a ship before. But it has spent years disposing of its own chemical weapons on land, using the same process that the FDHS uses. The chemical process is not new, and neither is the technology. The format, field-deployable, is new, however. The platform, aboard a ship, is also new. These additions to the process have created challenges for the team.

"This has not been done on this platform, not been done at sea," Baker said. "But it is taking the established operations we've done at several land sites domestically and internationally and is applying them here."

In the United States, the U.S. military has been destroying its own chemical weapons for years at places like Aberdeen Proving Ground, Md., and the recently-closed Pine Bluff Arsenal, Ala. Lessons from those facilities and others were used to develop the process that will be used aboard the Cape Ray to destroy Syrian chemical weapons.

The process for disposing of mustard gas was used at Aberdeen Proving Ground. The process for disposing of DF compound was taken from Pine Bluff Arsenal, Baker said. The processes and technologies from those locations were scaled down to make them transportable.

“So there is no mystery about the process,” Kendall said. “It is a slightly different scale that we are doing it at here. We had fixed installations that had hydrolysis units that could do this job. But what we did not have was a ‘transportable, field deployable’ system, the words we're using for these systems, that could be moved somewhere else.”

Malone, who has 20 years of experience destroying chemical weapons for the United States, said doing on a ship what he has done on land for two decades required some additional thought and effort.

“We had to figure out on the Cape Ray how to operate in three dimensions,” he said. The FHDS systems are inside tents inside the ship, for example. But the chemical weapons may be loaded on the ship on the deck above, and additional materials will be a deck below the FDHS equipment. On land, everything is spread out and on one level, he said.

“That's been the significant challenge and things we've had to overcome to get the Cape Ray ready for deployment,” he said.

Additionally, vibration studies were done to learn how lab equipment would operate on board a ship, he said. And the equipment had to be modified to anchor it into the ship using chains.

The U.S. chemical weapons demilitarization program often handles munitions that contain chemical weapons, such as rockets and projectiles that include a casing and explosive as well as the chemical component.

“That's that part that really limits throughput a lot of time, the de-mating of the explosive from the chemical agent and the body,” Malone said.

But aboard the Cape Ray, the mission will be different. It is not munitions that are being demilitarized, but liquid chemical agents.

“This can be done fairly quickly because all of the material we are receiving are going to be in a bulk configuration,” Malone said. “It's in large vessels, easily accessible, and for us it gives us a very high throughput.”

Rick Jordan, captain of the Cape Ray, a mariner for 40 years and an employee of contractor Keystone Shipping Company, said for this mission his crew expanded from 29 to 35. The additional six will support mainly what he calls “hotel services” on board the ship.

“We've got some really good folks on here that know how to train, and we've been training them,” he said. “They've got all kinds of shipboard damage control, damage control training and that sort of thing.”

He also said there is plenty of support for spill response as well as for fire suppression.

“The whole key here is teamwork,” he said. “There has been an unbelievable amount of teamwork in this whole process, from the Maritime Administration, Military Sealift Command, to the Keystone Shipping Company. I'm humbled by what is going on here. We've had about three or four

days of hard training together where we've been making mariners out of them, and they've been making chemical destruction folks out of us. And we're going to continue to train. The whole trip will be a combination of production, training and being ready for the worst case scenario."

Jordan said he has not yet received sailing orders, but estimated the time to sail to the center of the Mediterranean Sea at about 10 days. The mission will last 90 days.

That 90-day mission has about 45 days built in for "down days" due to bad weather. So the mission could be shorter.

"Weather is the single most important factor as a mariner that I have got to consider," Jordan said. "The good news for the Cape Ray is we have lots of things to mitigate weather on board."

He said the ship is equipped with stabilizers to dampen any roll. He also said that because the ship really has no destination, but is rather meant to serve as a platform, he can navigate around weather if need be.

Sea trials for the mission have already begun, and the Cape Ray will do more sea trials before it departs on its mission in about two weeks. It's expected the mission will include the neutralization of about 700 metric tons of chemical weapon agents. Those agents will be transferred to the Cape Ray from both Danish and Norwegian ships in a process expected to take about one or two days.

"Exactly where and how that process will take place has not been finalized yet," Kendall said.

U.S. Navy assets will provide security for the ship while it conducts operations, Kendall said.

Biographies:
Frank Kendall